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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CANDIDATES TELL NSA JONES SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION ARE THE KEY ELECTION ISSUES

¶1. In a June 23 meeting with National Security Advisor General Jones and Ambassador Eikenberry, leading opposition candidates Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, and Mr. Mirwais Yasini cited security, corruption, good governance, the role of women, and economic development as they key issue for the Afghan elections. All three candidates agreed that President Obama's Cairo speech had been well received by the Afghan public.

Key Political Issues in the Campaign

¶2. Ghani cited security, corruption, governance, and the dysfunctional justice system as the key issues for the election. He claimed the gap between the people and GIROA was growing. People were turning to the Taliban for administration of justice because the Taliban offered swifter justice than GIROA. Cases were typically heard by a single Talib who rendered his decision on the spot and ensured immediate compliance. Under GIROA's formal justice system, however, cases dragged on for years. People paid bribes just to have them heard, and favorable decisions were often bought. Ghani asserted the people would see another Karzai administration as continuity of bad policies and the continued decline of effective government.

¶3. Yasini believed the top political issues in the election would be: 1) rule of law; 2) national development; 3) institution building; and 4) ethnic community leaders willing to trade their support for personal power.

¶4. Abdullah believed the key issues would be: 1) security; 2) rule of law; 3) unemployment (there are 80,000 graduates from Afghan high schools each year, 60,000 of which cannot get into university); 4) conduct of Afghan and Coalition Forces (CF) military operations; and 5) reconciliation.

Role of Women

¶5. The three opposition candidates also discussed the role of women in Afghan society. In his campaign, Ghani intended to focus on jobs, education, property rights, and expanding the role of women officials and legislators in government. He believed women could prove a powerful voting bloc in this election. Yasini intended to focus his message to women voters on the issues of proportional representation in government, empowerment of women in the political process, and establishment of women's health clinics. Abdullah echoed his colleagues' points.

Economic Development

¶6. Of all the candidates, Ghani articulated the most detailed economic development plan. Ghani believed there were opportunities for sustainable economic growth in six areas: 1) agriculture, which had been neglected in recent years; 2) animal husbandry; 3) mining; 4) water management and distribution; 5) urban construction; and 6)

telecommunications. Ghani asserted that Afghan water sources produced 80 billion cubic feet of water per year, of which the Afghans only used 20 billion cubic feet. If Afghanistan harnessed its water through riparian right negotiations and hydro-electric production, he believed Afghanistan could be a net-exporter of electricity within 10 years.

¶7. Yasini advocated accepting an earlier offer by the Gulf countries to provide work permits to 100,000 Afghans. He called for harnessing and diverting water to populated and agricultural areas. Finally, he argued for forcing foreign construction operations, both NGOs and private companies, to stop importing labor, and require them to use local labor (much like the Arabization programs of some Gulf nations).

¶8. Abdullah echoed Ghani's views on the agricultural sector, and Yasini's views on "Afghanization" of jobs in the country. He regretted the need for skilled labor had led companies to bring in thousands of Pakistani and other foreign national laborers. Establishing training programs for Afghans would help address unemployment problems, promote infrastructure development and reduce the need for foreign labor.

POTUS' Outreach

¶9. The candidates all agreed that POTUS' Cairo speech had been an important step in improving U.S. relations with Muslim countries. Ghani believed the speech had set the stage for what was happening in Iran, and possibly affected Lebanon's elections. Yasini praised POTUS' use of the Quranic quote, saying it showed good will towards Muslims.

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¶10. NSA Jones has not cleared this cable.
EIKENBERRY